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ABSTRACT

The Central Educational Center (CEC) in Newnan, Georgia, is a unique partnership of local businesses and industries, the Coweta County Schools, and West Central Technical College. The CEC's programs were designed to address key concerns of Coweta County educators, parents, business owners and managers, college administrators, and students. The CEC's program is based on the following key principles that were identified through a review of the best available research and practice: (1) partnership and community involvement; (2) an employer-driven curriculum based on local needs assessment; (3) smooth transitions between high school and higher education and the workplace; (4) experiential learning with adults in the real work world; (5) dual enrollment leading to a diploma and certification; (6) high expectations for all students; (7) flexibility creating an opportunity for innovation; and (8) data-driven accountability. CEC's founders decided to establish it as a charter school because of the considerable freedom that charter school status affords with respect to organizational structure, management, and instructional practice. CEC serves students in both high school and technical college and offers a variety of work-based learning experiences through internships, simulations in labs, and paid work experiences. Since opening in 2000-2001, CEC has served as an engine of economic development in Coweta County and its enrollment has increased from 400 to 856 students per semester. (Contains 10 references.) (MN)

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RECONCEPTUALIZING EDUCATION AS AN ENGINE OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

A CASE STUDY OF THE CENTRAL EDUCATIONAL CENTER

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Academy for Educational Development
National Institute for Work and Learning
Washington, DC

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AED

National Institute
for Work and Learning

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IMAGINE....

IMAGINE YOU'RE A HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT....

....Your classes are taught by enthusiastic instructors who bring applied work experience to their classroom in addition to subject matter knowledge. Your classmates include students from high schools throughout the county as well as adults and community college students, so there's a higher maturity level in the class. You work on projects, as a member of a team, and gain hands-on work experience using state of the art technical equipment both in school and in on-the-job internships. When you graduate, you'll receive your high school diploma and a certificate in at least one employer-recognized field. Chances are, a well-paying job will be waiting for you.

IMAGINE YOU'RE A TEACHER....

....Your students are motivated and eager to learn. Because of the flexibility you have in instruction, you are able to show students the relevance of your subject matter. You know that their learning is deeper and their retention will be greater, because they see the connection between what they are learning and what they will be doing once they graduate. You are treated as a professional by your administrators and have the respect of the community. Local employers want to partner with you because they recognize you as the critical link between the worlds of education and employment.

IMAGINE YOU'RE A PLANT MANAGER....

....The concerns you had about recruitment of new and skilled employees are beginning to recede. You've met with school administrators and explained the challenges you face with respect to a skilled labor market and workforce development, and the administrators not only listened, they acted. Now you're working with high school and technical college instructors to design and develop curriculum and create new courses of study that will prepare today's students for tomorrow's jobs. Your current employees, many of whom have children of their own in school, respect the commitment their company has made to improving education.

IMAGINE YOU'RE A CONCERNED MEMBER OF THE COMMUNITY....

....Your youngest child graduated several years ago and had to move north to find a decent job. But with new companies relocating to the area, you're hoping she and her husband might be able to move back to town and start a family of their own. You've noticed property values are starting to go back up and there's a noticeable energy in the air when you shop downtown. It's been months since you've seen your neighbor's son, who you sometimes caught playing hooky in your backyard, so you ask his mom about him. "Oh, he's developed a real interest in graphic design. He's got an internship with a printing company here in town. He's totally changed since he started at the new school." He always did have talent, you smile to yourself.

Many in Coweta County, Georgia, no longer have to imagine. A new approach to education is becoming a reality.

RECONCEPTUALIZING EDUCATION

Educational change starts with imagining new solutions to old problems.

Perhaps you're the superintendent of schools or the president of a technical college, a teacher or guidance counselor. Maybe you're the mayor or the governor. You might be the owner of a small business or a parent. How do you want education to be structured in your community? What is education supposed to accomplish? Can education support the development of our young people and our communities at the same time? What needs do you have that education, if it was organized just a little differently, could meet more effectively?

These questions led the citizens of Coweta County, Georgia to reconceptualize high school education—a reconceptualization that ultimately led to the creation of the Central Educational Center (CEC), a unique partnership based in Newnan among business and industry, the Coweta County Schools, and West Central Technical College. Through partnership, CEC addresses the mutual concerns of educators, parents, business owners and managers, college administrators, and the students themselves.

"Education is Everything"

A few years ago, Coweta County was like many communities in the United States. Most educators and community members thought college was the natural next step after high school. Therefore, high school ought to prepare young people for college. And it had a school system that did a pretty good job preparing the top students for just that. But like most communities, close to half of Coweta's students don't go to college. And about half of those who enroll, never complete their degree. Thus we end up with a K-12 educational system that is designed to effectively serve about one-quarter of the student population. What about the rest?

At the same time, employers in Coweta and elsewhere began to notice two trends. First, the demands of the workplace were increasing as a result of technological innovation and globalization. Employees need to have more advanced skills to do the same type of work and to do it more efficiently. Second, employers were having a harder time finding qualified employees, ones with fundamental skills and an ability to learn. The problem was especially acute among non-college degreed applicants. Though the employers may not have recognized it at the time, their needs were changing—but the traditional goals and processes of education were not. More and more jobs in Coweta County are requiring special skills or technical training.

Inside the schools, teachers struggled with two interrelated problems—a declining level of motivation among students coupled with unacceptable dropout rates. Parents were likewise discouraged because they knew their children "didn't really like school and were not being successful in school." Still, while many parents were not satisfied with the status quo, they were not necessarily motivated or seemed unsure of how to promote change.

Meanwhile, far beyond the school grounds, economic developers and county planners wrestled with the challenges of attracting new businesses to the area while helping to grow the businesses already there. It was becoming increasing clear that the vitality of the community and

opportunities for economic development were inextricably linked to the quality of education and training. It has become a truism that the "currency of the new economy is knowledge and information."

Along those lines but at the state level, a similar round of deliberations were taking place, exploring the strategic options to grow the state's economy. What policies and practices could the state employ to attract business and industry to Georgia? The QuickStart program, which provides customized training services to relocating businesses, had already demonstrated its value. In this model, 34 technical colleges throughout the state provide the platform for education and training services to new and expanding businesses, on everything from new technology to retention of employees. "QuickStart is high profile," explained Dr. Ken Breeden, Commissioner of Georgia's Department of Technical and Adult Education. "We're a real part of the economic development team." According to Breeden, the Governor has regularly stated that "QuickStart is the economic development strategy for the state."

But more needed to be done to develop the local workforce. "The market for skilled and trained workers is growing so fast," Breeden observed. "We're interested in competing for high-skill/high-wage jobs. The number one thing we need for economic development is an available and well-trained workforce. Education is everything."

"The Stars Aligned"

In Newnan and Coweta County, the employer community, West Central Technical College, and the school district each had distinct problems they were trying to solve. The employer community was having a hard time finding qualified workers. West Central Technical College (WCTC), a leader in workforce development serving four counties in the region, had been grappling with how to strengthen programs and reach more individuals in Coweta County. As a start, WCTC leaders wanted to centralize course offerings and activities in Newnan under one roof. At the same time, the superintendent of schools and school board were struggling to find a way to improve programs for non-college bound students.

Personal conversations among individuals evolved into extended deliberations among the organizations. Vague concerns evolved into strategic goals. Others in the community joined in the deliberations. The deliberations evolved into a series of meetings. "Once this community's leaders were mobilized, we really started to see movement," observed one employer. In 1997, the loosely affiliated group decided to formalize a steering committee comprised of 20 influential movers and shakers representing a broad cross-section of stakeholder groups. Said one member of the steering committee, "Within a relatively short period of time, everyone was at the table."

> "The general purpose of education is to increase the probability of success for our students post-education. Until we embrace that notion, no radical change is going to happen."
>
> Joe Harless, Ph.D.
> Author, Consultant

Interest and excitement surrounded what appeared to be a unique opportunity to forge new alliances among high schools, the technical college, and the private sector. All the necessary

ingredients were on the table. All that was needed was a process to help the group work together in a winning combination.

Dr. Joe Harless, a nationally respected consultant who for 30 years helped business, industry, and the military improve the performance of their employees, just happened to live in town. In 1998, Harless published "The Eden Conspiracy," which explored how education could be reformed around accomplishment-based curriculum, an approach that was uniquely suited to addressing the multitude of concerns the various stakeholders brought to the table. "I invited myself to get involved," confided Harless. Given his experience and interest, Harless was designated as the chair of the steering committee.

In retrospect, when asked how CEC came into being, many of those involved nonchalantly replied, "The stars just aligned." And with respect to gathering the input and commitment of key organizations, this may be true. But the ease of forming initial alliances belies a tremendous planning effort. The committee reviewed the literature on successful school-business partnerships, explored promising and effective pedagogical strategies, visited exemplary programs, was steeped in accomplishment-based curriculum development, and most importantly, developed a deep and authentic understanding of the unique needs of each stakeholder group. From this understanding, a common vision was formed.

CONCEPTUAL VISION

CEC would be a place where the highest levels of learning for all could be achieved. Drawing on the best research and practice available, the Steering Committee identified the basic building blocks on which CEC would be built. Expectations for student performance would be high, given the expanding demands of the new economy. Experiential learning through applied and hands-on projects would be a common part of the daily classroom. Young people would be given new flexibility to "design" a program of study that prepared them for multiple pathways beyond high school—pathways dictated by changes in the economy. These would combine advanced technical training with a higher level of academic instruction than traditionally seen in connection with vocational education. Seemingly separated levels of education, secondary and technical college, would be vertically integrated into a seamless mix through instructor collaborations and dual-enrollment opportunities. This core instructional package would be topped with heavy doses of work-based learning—real opportunities to practice classroom learning in the local economy. Along the way, local business would provide advice, counsel, direction, and expertise in the classroom.

Critical Features of CEC

- Partnership, community involvement: all contribute, all benefit
- Employer-driven curriculum: based on local needs assessment, reviewed and revised as necessary
- Seamless: smooth transitions between high school and higher education and the workplace
- Experiential learning: active, hands-on, work-based, real world, with adults, engaging, applied
- Dual enrollment: diploma and certification
- High expectations for all students
- Flexibility: creates opportunity for innovation
- Data driven: collecting and examining data, holding themselves accountable

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The effort at the secondary level linked to a technical college would provide both competitive pressure and an opportunity to attract adults back into the classroom for retraining.

After 18 months of intensive work, the committee produced an action plan. It would take approximately another year before CEC opened its doors to students in August 2000.

WHO ARE WE AND WHY ARE WE INTERESTED IN CEC?

Founded in 1961, the Academy for Educational Development (AED) is an independent, nonprofit organization committed to solving critical social problems in the United States and throughout the world. Major areas of focus include health, education, youth and leadership development, and the environment.

The authors of this paper are affiliated with the National Institute for Work and Learning (NIWL), which is housed within the U.S. Education and Workforce Development Group of AED. We focus our attention on the intersection of education and employment. Our projects regularly cross the traditional boundaries that separate schools, workplaces, and communities. Indeed, we seek to blur those boundaries by reforming education and improving the interrelationships between education, work, and the surrounding community—goals we believe are shared by CEC.

Our mission is to help local, state, and national agencies transform the educational enterprise by exploring new models of instructional practice, building organizational capacity, and providing professional development opportunities together with the tools to assess and improve effectiveness.

As part of our ongoing work, we at NIWL believe it is imperative that educational research focus more directly on documenting and quantifying the economic benefits of educational innovations such as CEC to the county and region in which they are situated. In doing so, we chose to concentrate our attention more on the external relationships that helped establish and sustain CEC rather than its internal components and practices. Therefore, readers will not find many details in this paper on instructional practice or student progress.[1] Our goal was to learn as much as possible about the promise and potential of the CEC partnership model so that we can share developmental design features, promising practices, and lessons learned with others.

Which brings us back to how education was reconceptualized in Coweta County.

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[1] For a thorough evaluation of these issues, readers are referred to a parallel study undertaken by Florida State University (FSU). Focusing on the internal structure of CEC using surveys of faculty, staff, parents, and alumni, FSU will report on the operation of the CEC instructional system and measure its performance. We believe the inquiry undertaken by AED complements the programmatic focus of the FSU evaluation by examining how CEC, as a model of educational improvement, relates to the wider community. Ours is a perspective that examines CEC's relationships with other institutions and processes, namely workforce development and economic development. Contact Anthony Chow, Department of Instructional Systems, FSU, for additional information.

CEC As School

"It's a totally different atmosphere. Kids want to be there, teachers want to be there, and it shows." Ellis Cadenhead, Assistant General Manager, Newnan Utilities

The planning and development of CEC began years before the first class enrolled. Coming to appreciate the related concerns of education, workforce development, and economic development took time in and of itself. From there, the relationships between the public and private sectors, and among their respective organizations, took shape. The story of how CEC was formed, and to a large degree how it operates, is intimately wound up in relationships among local community partners. Later in this report we focus on the nature and value of partnership. In this section, we provide a general overview of how CEC looks today, as it evolved from original concept to reality. Details on instructional practice are addressed in a parallel study by Florida State University. Here we report on the following major dimensions of CEC organization: charter school status, leadership, course offerings, student enrollment, and faculty.

Organization and Structure of CEC

In order to understand how CEC was implemented and the reconceptualized structure of education shared by community stakeholders, it is essential to recognize that CEC was established as a charter school.[2] Charter school status affords schools a remarkable degree of freedom with respect to organizational structure, management, and instructional practice. Viewed as a vital strategy to address local educational needs, charter schools have grown exponentially in the U.S. from 430 only six years ago to over 2, 800 today.

"The general purpose of education is to provide a basis on which every person can do anything and everything they want to do in their lives."

Business owner

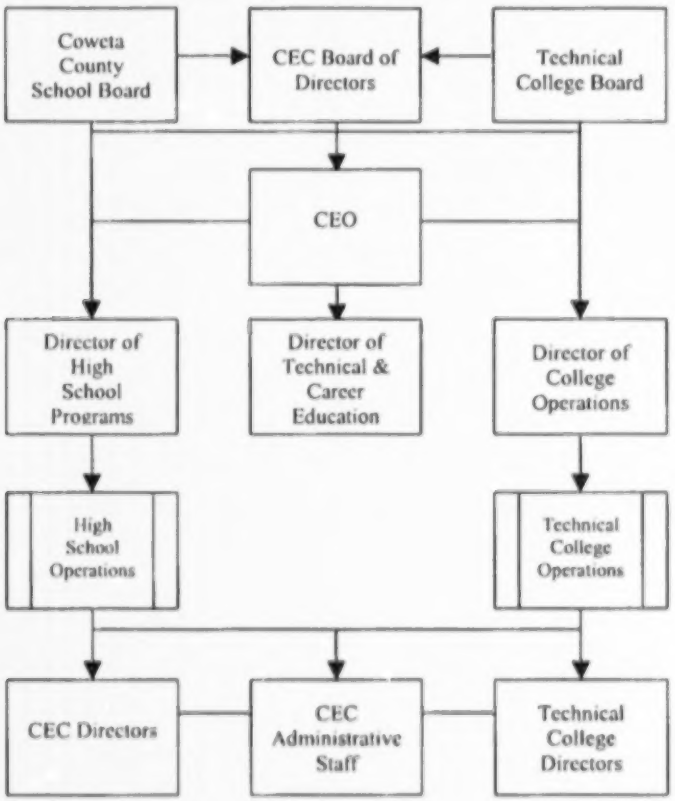
Charter school status gives school planners and administrators considerable, but not unlimited, flexibility. The charter must adhere to certain state and school district parameters and the school is obligated to report to the superintendent of schools. Yet, CEC is deliberately positioned to be directly accountable to business and parents. In the case of CEC, flexibility is most visibly manifested in its mandate to respond to business and community needs. CEC's charter makes it possible for partners to create and maintain a school culture and climate distinct from that of traditional high schools.

In the words of Dr. Peggy Connell, Superintendent of Coweta County Schools, "CEC is not limited by the rules and regulations that have become ingrained in the more traditional education system. Its flexibility allows for actions that couldn't be taken and decisions that couldn't be made when dealing with regular school. For example, in a regular school environment, adjusting the number of hours of seat time a student needs while offering work-based learning and off-site experiences would have been an arduous task. It's doable in the CEC environment under the CEC governance structure."

[2] More specifically, CEC is technically considered a start-up charter, created de novo, as opposed to a conversion charter that converts an existing school to charter status.

The following organizational chart delineates the lines of reporting and governance structure of CEC.

CENTRAL EDUCATIONAL CENTER ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



LEADERSHIP

> *"Leadership transforms vision into reality." Warren Bennis, Ph.D., Professor of Business, University of Southern California*

In our studies of best practices and effective programs, we have consistently found a correlation between success and strong leadership. Leadership can come in at least two major forms. In the first case, it references vision and the determination and ability to move that vision forward. Such leadership often extends beyond the school and includes chief school and college administrators, civic leaders, and other stakeholder groups, like parent and business organizations. Clearly, there was evidence of this dimension of leadership in Coweta County.

The second type is organizational leadership. By organizational leadership we are referring to building-level administration. In the case of CEC, this includes the CEO and the Directors of High School Programs, Technical and Career Education, and College Operations. The organizational chart presents the reporting relationships of these positions to their respective Boards. It's instructional to note the deliberate use of nontraditional titles for these positions.

For example, in a traditional high school, the Director of High School Programs would be called the Principal. The terminology of "CEO" and "Director" is more consistent with the business-like culture that pervades CEC.

At CEC, the CEO holds responsibility for oversight and integration of high school, technical and career education and college operations. Applying a matrix management model, he acts as a facilitator, building and strengthening connections among business partners, the school district, WCTC, parents, state and local political officials, and the community at-large. The CEO is the public "face" of CEC.

"Charter school flexibility accommodates the idea of a CEO," said a staff member. "It makes it possible to bring in a businessman with real world experience to run the school." Indeed, Mark Whitlock, the CEO, comes to CEC with a strong background in banking and financial services. However, Whitlock is no stranger to the field of education. His undergraduate degree is in social science education and he continues to be well read in the field of education. In addition, he played a leadership role in the establishment of a Montessori school serving as a founding member and chair of its board. But the comment we heard most in interviews is that he "clearly brings a business perspective through his training and practice."

The fact that the CEO comes with a business background is viewed as extremely beneficial. "It didn't concern us that the CEO was from business and not education," said one board member. "He brings a healthy new perspective." Perhaps more importantly, the CEO's business pedigree helps bridge the chasm between public education and the private sector. He's fluent in both educational and business parlance and being from "their" environment, he's trusted by business partners.

> "The true goal of education is the application of knowledge."
>
> CEO of CEC

Outsider and Insider

When asked to describe the characteristics of good leadership, the individuals we interviewed tended to cite strong communication skills, a clear commitment to quality education, the ability to convey that vision to others while delegating and empowering staff, sincerity and integrity, and the ability to manage multifaceted projects. Though often difficult to embody as effectively as the current CEO has, these are fairly standard descriptors of good leadership. Two other characteristics were identified as being especially important. First, the fact that "Mark is from Newnan but has been outside of Newnan." This was described as a potent combination since it provides the important objectivity of an outsider with the credibility of an insider.

The second was a conscious commitment to extend a high level of autonomy and respect to the administrative directors, with an emphasis on professionalism, that they in turn extend to the instructional staff. "You'd be amazed at how far this goes to help compensate for the low pay educators have," confided one staff member. It's worth noting that the terminology of "directors" is applied to the classroom instructor, thereby elevating the professional status typically afforded "teachers." (For the purposes of this paper, we employ the term instructor to reference the directors of program instruction, to avoid potential confusion.)

The CEO reports to a Board of Directors as dictated in the school's charter. The board meets every other month to conduct strategic planning and reflect on progress. The board considers and advises on issues such as student attendance, busing schedules, tracking outcomes, resource acquisition and distribution, communications, and marketing. CEC recognizes the need to generate parent support and include parental input when setting policy. A majority (9) of the seats on the 17-member board are held by parents, with four held by business representatives and four by educators, features mandated by the charter. In addition, the school board reviews the CEC curriculum at regular intervals. With the charter ultimately awarded by the State, the CEO encounters three layers of audit via the CEC board, the Coweta County School Board, and the Department of Education for the State of Georgia. Additional layers of audit—through the West Central Technical College and its governing Board as representatives of the State's Department of Technical and Adult Education—stem from the design of CEC to seamlessly integrate secondary and postsecondary education.

Seamlessness Between High School and Technical College

> *"During my junior year of high school, I took advantage of a Health Occupations program offered at Central Educational Center or CEC as we call it. Believe it or not, I graduated with a technical college certificate before I even graduated high school! Most importantly (to me and to the economy of my community) I am able to work as a Certified Nursing Assistant in a nursing home or hospital." Jamie Rodriguez, Class of 2002*

CEC itself physically houses a high school and technical college under its roof. As a founding partner, West Central Technical College sought a physical presence in Newnan to serve its historically older population of adults wanting to enhance their employability skills and gain industry-recognized certification. The co-location of WCTC on a high school campus provided the opportunity to deliver an extended array of dual-enrollment options to a younger population. As a result, 52 percent of students enrolled in West Central at CEC are under the age of 25. Due to the influx of CEC graduates at other WCTC campuses, the average age of technical college students is declining overall.

Dual enrollment provides an excellent mechanism to create smooth, "seamless" transitions between high school and higher education. This is a key feature of CEC and one highly touted at the state level by the governor and others. On a practical level, dual enrollment offers high school students the opportunity to obtain their diploma and a certificate of credit simultaneously. As a result, students find themselves better positioned to participate in the labor market immediately after graduation and/or make thoughtful decisions with respect to postsecondary education.

The powerful social and psychological effects of dual enrollment should not be ignored. Instructional staff reported that having high school-age and adult-age college students in the same class has a positive effect on the younger students' maturity. Graduates of CEC commented on the value of having opportunities to interact with adult students while still in high school, claiming an increased comfort level in the adult workplace and an increased sense of self-confidence that is not generally derived from peer interaction.

COURSES, CERTIFICATE PROGRAMS, AND CURRICULUM

> *"CEC doesn't treat its students as just kids. They are team members and are treated as such. The learning environment at CEC emphasizes character, work ethic, and how to make it in the business world today. By offering hands-on educational experiences, CEC is meeting those standards while paving the way for the future of education."*
> *CEC Graduate*

Through an initial needs analysis, local business and industry helped identify the major areas of concentration. Programs of study are organized under four broad career paths: Business and Computer Information Systems; Health and Medical; Technology and Engineering; and Services.

According to the Director of High School Programs, "Every course in the CEC curriculum responds to needs in the local labor market." Students can choose from programs that range from high tech (e.g., computer repair, computer networking, and CAD) to construction and production (e.g., certified manufacturing specialist, machine tool technology, and metal joining) to health care (e.g., dental assisting, patient care assisting), travel and tourism, and broadcasting.

With respect to curriculum development, teachers and central office curriculum developers sit down with representatives from business who serve as subject matter experts (SMEs) to identify skills, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors needed in the workplace. The curriculum is built around those parameters. An important feature of this reconceptualized education is the ability for business representatives to inform, design, and help deliver the curriculum. To ensure that classrooms are adequately equipped, discussions with employer partners include identification and acquisition of state-of-the art equipment and technology.

> "The purpose of education should be to give a person a positive concept of self, plus the necessary skills to be productive in the workforce. Education should never limit a person."
>
> Dental Assisting Director

Through open lines of communication with the community and through the more formalized role of the SMEs, business and industry have the opportunity to guide and influence curriculum development. Subsequently, if a program no longer aligns with labor market demands and does not have minimal placement, retention, or graduation rates, that program can be eliminated.

In addition to academic grades, students receive a "work ethic grade" comprised of scores along ten factors or themes. These themes rotate on a weekly basis. Productivity was the theme during the week of our visit and a large banner with the word **"PRODUCTIVITY"** in big bold letters hung in the main corridor as a prominent reminder. All instructors are expected to work the themes into their curriculum and lesson plans. The work ethic grade does not currently appear on students' high school transcripts. In the future, the district would like to see all high school classes give both academic and work ethic grades, a strategy we would endorse.

Even administrative concerns like attendance are used to convey an understanding of workplace expectations. For example, absenteeism and tardiness are not considered behavioral problems, but performance related. At CEC, the thinking is that if you're not there, you can't learn. This

again mirrors the business model—if you are not at work, you can't do your job. A point reward and deduction system linked to students' class participation grade is used to drive the concept home.

Much of the curricula is self-directed and self-paced, a feature that reinforces the need for self-discipline. "I had access to a teacher when I needed it, but actually I finished ahead of schedule. That allowed me to do extra stuff," explained one student proudly.

Research on work-based learning, offered at CEC through internships, simulations in labs, or paid work experiences, has shown that it helps students acquire general workplace competencies; explore and plan careers; and acquire knowledge and skills in particular industries. But it also creates another level of learning for the student, one that engages them in the learning process. Students report that, "The whole school has a different atmosphere. You're not a student at your desk all day." As expected, the work-based learning and project-based learning approaches have made a strong impression on the students. "Hands-on is just great," one alumnus beamed. She highlighted the emphasis on developing products rather than testing while another commented on her performance-based assessment in front of a professional RN. Both underscore the fact that performance is what gets measured in "the real world."

Student Enrollment and Demographics

> *"Most high school students just want to get out. The students at CEC are more motivated. They're working for a job or preparation for college. They act more grown up." CEC Graduate*

One student described CEC as "a full-service educational hub." Indeed, CEC offers a rich array of educational services to a diverse student population. CEC serves students in both high school and technical college. Some of the high school students are dual-enrolled in technical college certification programs. In addition, adult students prepare for their GED in evening courses and high school students in need of remediation and course make-up attend evening high school. Lastly, the well-resourced school offers local employers the opportunity for off-site training. The FSU study referenced earlier focuses on the dual-enrolled population. Our interests are broader, but still generally limited to the high school and technical college programs as the demographics presented below attest.

CEC Enrollment Count August 2002

High Schools	AM	PM	Totals	% of Total	Distance from CEC
Newnan	186	146	332	39%	2 miles
East Coweta	226	139	365	43%	10 miles
Northgate	102	57	159	18%	10+ miles
Totals	514	342	856	100%	

CEC draws students from across the three high schools in Coweta County and the school's enrollment mirrors that of the county. About 28 percent of the students identify themselves as a racial minority. As a charter school, CEC is not allowed to establish admissions requirements, however, individual programs can require specific criteria for enrollment. Transportation to and from CEC is not an issue. About 85 percent of the students drive to CEC. The remaining 15 percent take school buses from their base high schools.

Since opening their doors in the fall of 2000, CEC has witnessed substantial growth as depicted in the chart below.

CEC Program Growth

Program Year	School Year	Total Students per Semester	Unique Individuals Served per Year
1st year	2000-2001	400	650
2nd year	2001-2002	800	1246
3rd year	2002-2003	856	TBD

Last year (2001-2002) about 10 percent of the student body attended CEC for the full day, but that proportion increased to about 13 percent this year. In 2001, CEC graduated 96 high school students with technical college certificates of credit (TCCs) from WCTC (58 percent female, 29 percent minority). This past spring (2002) CEC graduated 128 students with at least one TCC from WCTC. That number, too, is expected to increase. In the first semester this year, 63 students are dual enrolled already.

In addition to the 63 dual-enrolled high school students, WCTC enrolls 312 adults. Over half of these students are well under the average age of typical technical college students. About 24 of these young adult students attend classes with the dual-enrolled high school students while the remaining 288 attend night courses through WCTC.

Approximately 190 adults attend evening classes generally focused on GED test preparation, while 72 high school students attend evening high school, with 80 percent taking classes in order to stay on track for graduation with their class.

FACULTY

According to the students, the instructors at CEC are among the best they ever had. Some qualities mentioned include: knowledge of the subject matter, personally involved with students, with a knack for making learning fun. The students felt they were treated more maturely by their teachers, "like we're adults," said one female graduate. Not surprisingly, students tend to react positively to such treatment. In turn, the students tend to have more respect for their teachers, a benefit not lost on the teachers themselves.

"For most folks around here, the purpose of education is to prepare us for the world after school. But I say it's to improve our quality of life as well. Education makes us better people."

High School Math Director

There appears to be growing consensus that the ideal teacher has some real-world industry experience. Indeed, applied experience can be a real asset in the classroom. It allows instructors to link academic concepts to occupational applications. In addition, students seem to respond more favorably to those who have been in the real world. "I have a lot more credibility with the students," said a former plant manager.

It's safe to say that the staff come from diverse backgrounds. Charter school status affords CEC the luxury of recruiting staff who might not hold conventional teaching certification. While some staff have a combination of academic and applied experience, others come directly from the world of business or the military. Still, the majority of instructors appear to have conventional teacher training and traditional teaching backgrounds. What makes instructional practice at CEC unique is that staff have the freedom to approach education in a non-traditional way. The climate of the school, the direction from leadership, and the school's charter status encourage this flexibility. "The rule here is to be different," said last year's teacher of the year.

Given CEC's career development focus, career guidance and career development are integrated into the culture of CEC. That is to say, guidance is not simply the counselor's role, but rather a responsibility shared by all. "Every Director is a counselor," says the CEO. In turn, the counselor's role is evolving to a managerial position focusing on course selection and credit attainment.

It was suggested, half-jokingly, that the staff was "hand picked." In truth, many of the teachers who joined the CEC staff during the first year volunteered for the position. However, now, as CEC adds new staff, administrators are seeking out people who are creative—who are still motivated and energized by the job.

Likewise, efforts were made to identify appropriate college staff that would thrive in the CEC environment. To support the recruitment process, administrators brought teachers from other West Central campuses to tour CEC facilities.

Full-Time CEC Staff

- 56 individuals listed are listed on 2002 staff roster in total
- 9 administrators and support staff are listed under Coweta County School System including a career counselor
- 30 Directors on HS instructional staff, and 1 tech support person
- 16 are on staff from WCTC, including admininstrative staff, career planner, and directors
- 8 Directors on WCTC instructional staff and 1 tech support person
- A variable number of adjunct instructors per quarter provide part-time support for evening WCTC classes.

THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

> *"What really stood out for me? I thought it was going to be easier. I didn't think it was going to be as serious with respect to job building and career building. I just thought I'd have something to put on my resume. I have so much more now." CEC Alumnus*

As mentioned earlier, the FSU evaluation is concentrating on instructional practice and student-level outcomes. While it would be premature to present detailed statistics at this point in time, several early indicators point toward success.

For example, since CEC began operations, the annualized drop-out rate, grades 9 to 12 in Coweta County Schools, has dropped from around 7 percent to around 3 percent.

According to graduates, "Students [at CEC] are more mature, more disciplined. And if they're not, they will be when they graduate." A good mechanism CEC uses to promote this trait is the emphasis placed on performance-based assessment. For example, students in the Health Occupations program demonstrate the skills they have learned under the critical eye of a registered nurse. As one student acknowledged, "I was nervous, yeah, but afterward, I felt more pride than if it had simply been a test."

WCTC administrators suggested that students experience a boost to self-esteem when they realize that they can perform at the college level. Eighty percent of students in the Class of 2001 graduating with a technical certificate indicated a likelihood that they would pursue postsecondary education and anecdotal evidence bears this out. The local average in Coweta County is about 40 percent. What accounts for the large difference? Like the WCTC administrators, FSU researchers attribute the high proportion to the familiarity CEC students gain with college expectations and environment and a newfound confidence that they can perform at the college level. Other contributing factors likely include the benefits of smaller learning communities and a more positive outlook toward education. At the same time, it is possible that a more motivated student is attracted to the CEC program.[3]

> "The purpose of education is to provide options for people—career options, learning opportunities—it's a way to open up the gates for people."
>
> Director of Student Support Services, WCTC

Regardless, CEC is having an impact. One student described her experience as follows: "Thanks to CEC and its business partners, I have a great start on my future. They have opened the door for me to launch my career as a physical therapist. I am one of many set apart from the average student, and I have gained a greater sense of professionalism, self-esteem, and purpose."[4]

[3] See also FSU Study. Report 1, July 2002. Additional reports forthcoming.

[4] Excerpts from an essay by Jamie Rodriguez, CEC Class of 2002. Excerpted with permission of the author.

CEC As Partnership

In Coweta County, CEC is more than a school—it's a partnership. The relationships that key stakeholder groups in Coweta County formed to develop the CEC concept, turn it into reality, and, now, provide ongoing support to operations, strategic planning, and growth are a vital part of CEC.

Over the past decade, NIWL has examined dozens of partnerships between schools and businesses, primarily through intensive case studies. From coast to coast and from the most rural areas to the most urban, it has been our experience that strong and meaningful collaboration and partnerships among a wide range of groups in a community are necessary to create meaningful change in educational practices and strategies. Formalized partnerships provide stakeholders with clear goals; a concrete management and governance structure; clearly delineated roles and responsibilities; networks to facilitate communications; and mechanisms to broker connections and ensure fairly precise coordination of activities. Through partnerships, stakeholders function as one unified team in accomplishing common goals.

With business involvement contributing an estimated $2.4 billion and 109 million volunteer hours to schools each year, these partnerships have an impact on the lives of an estimated 35 million students.[5] We have observed growing evidence that today's relationships between schools and business are notably different from those of the past which resulted in one-way philanthropic efforts from businesses to schools, or commercial relationships in which schools provided a marketplace for the sale of products and services. Today's thoughtful educators and business leaders seek true partnerships that build on a shared understanding of values and culture that support mutual needs.

A Meeting of the Minds

We truly believe that in order to effect change, schools need support and therefore must rely on resources—human, financial, and material—from outside the school walls. But establishing the necessary relationships and trust to build truly effective partnerships is much easier said than done. Who were the key stakeholder groups that came together to form the CEC partnership and how did the partnership come about?

The School District. While the community in general was satisfied with the quality and rigor of the college preparatory programs offered at all three of the county's high schools, only a fraction of the county's high school graduates were going on to postsecondary education, and even fewer were finishing with degrees. With 65 percent of the jobs in the county requiring special skills or technical training, district administrators knew they needed to improve career and technical education programs so that students not going on to postsecondary education would have viable and meaningful alternatives. In order to offer the kind of high tech career and technical education programs that would improve postsecondary outcomes for "middle of the road" students, the district would need to make major investments in equipment and facilities at the

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[5] Lamar Alexander and Richard W. Riley, "A Compass in the Storm." Education Week, October 9, 2002.

new high school and revamp programs at the two existing high schools. Administrators began exploring possible strategies for consolidating the career and technical education programs offered across the county under one roof, with the goals of strengthening programs and eliminating the duplication of costs and efforts.

Postsecondary Involvement. West Central Technical College had been trying to establish a presence in Coweta County for years. It had been "borrowing" space at local high schools in order to offer night classes but wanted to provide more flexibility in scheduling and maybe reach a younger population of students. It, too, was looking for a base for activities in Newnan. But college administrators wanted more than just a site for classes, they wanted to develop a business and industry partnership to inform course development and ensure that programs were truly responsive to local labor market needs.

Community Leaders. At the same time, local real estate agents were having a hard time selling commercial real estate in Coweta County and were just beginning to realize that a shortage of skilled workers and limited training opportunities might be to blame. Faced with the possible loss of one of the community's largest employers, business leaders, educators, and representatives from local government formed 21st Century Coweta, an economic development initiative. Led by Scott Frederick, 21st Century Coweta provided a framework to discuss what might be done to encourage existing businesses to stay and others to relocate and invest in the county. They began developing Vision 2020, a plan for supporting "smart growth."

> "Education needs to be more than teaching theory. It's teaching application. It's purpose should be to prepare students for the real world."
>
> Parent

Employers. Don Moore, the plant manager at Bon-L, a major manufacturer in Newnan, noticed that many of his employees—even the ones that had graduated from high school—had limited academic proficiency. While he was confident that his company had the subject matter expertise to successfully train people in the technical skills needed to work in the plant, he was hesitant to get into the business of providing whole-scale remediation in the areas of reading and writing. He felt that the overall lack of basic skills evidenced by his workforce was a symptom of a much larger systemic problem that would be more appropriately addressed by the local school system. At Chamber of Commerce meetings, other employers were voicing similar concerns. In addition, some small business owners were complaining that their employees would often miss work in order to meet with their children's teachers to discuss problems at school and that this was having a big impact on operations and productivity. Business leaders knew that in order to solve their problems something would have to be done to change the way education was delivered in Newnan, and they wanted a seat at the table.

On behalf of the employer community and in the spirit of enlightened self-interest, the plant manager at Bon-L approached the superintendent of schools with his concerns and a partnership was formed. A twenty-person committee with representatives of all of the key stakeholder groups—the school district, WCTC, local government, business, and industry—met to identify a common solution to their unique but related problems. Because the superintendent had also been grappling with the need for change, he was very receptive to the idea.

ACTIVE EMPLOYER INVOLVEMENT

> *"The commitment of the employer community in Newnan extends beyond buying donuts and t-shirts." School District Administrator*

The business community is often credited with being the catalyst for the partnership, with residents pointing to the plant manager at Bon-L as the initial driver of change. When the steering committee needed to build support for CEC at the state level and generate the additional funds that would be required to renovate and expand their proposed site, the business community, through the Chamber of Commerce, was instrumental in lobbying efforts. Chamber members successfully promoted CEC to the governor and general assembly, requesting support and calling in favors.

Since CEC's inception, the Chamber of Commerce has been a vehicle for sharing information about CEC with its members, generating interest, and coordinating employer involvement. In addition, a number of local employers sit on CEC's Board of Directors and advisory bodies, while others donate equipment, lend subject matter expertise to the curriculum development process, and provide young people with access to work-based learning opportunities. To date, over 150 local employers have provided CEC students with work-based learning opportunities.

There is a growing awareness among business leaders that their active involvement in educational reform is essential for their own survival and growth. Indeed, the number of school-business partnerships is on the rise. Ed Rust, Jr., Chairman and CEO of State Farm, has stated that "business leaders who are not actively involved in education are short sighted." Under the No Child Left Behind legislation, the role of business is probably more crucial than ever before.

However, it has been our experience that it takes the combined efforts of a diverse cross-section of individuals and groups, including educators, community-based organizations, parents, and students, to improve education and employment outcomes for young people. Each of these groups contributes a distinct set of talents and resources to partnership activities.

SEAMLESSNESS REQUIRES INTERINSTITUTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

We were frequently told that CEC would not exist without the support of the business community. While this is true, it was our observation that CEC's existence is actually the result of commitment from the highest levels of leadership on many fronts. It is clear that in order to implement an initiative like CEC, the business community needs to be on board to drive change, and its ongoing support is vital to sustain and develop further efforts. Still, we feel it is important to note that each of the major stakeholder groups was equally important in the development of CEC, and their continued involvement will be essential for future success.

For instance, what would have happened if the superintendent and school board hadn't been willing to work with business and industry on addressing their concerns? Business leaders would have had to find alternative solutions, which may have included relocation. Across the country, businesses and schools are constantly talking about the need to work together. In Coweta County, the superintendent was not only willing to hear the concerns of the business community, he really listened. Then he took action so that the outcome was more than just an

amicable but meaningless dialogue. The school district's involvement made it possible for West Central Technical College to connect with a much younger population of students. Further, with the school district's endorsement, parents were confident that CEC programs would be academically rigorous and that their children would not be left behind if they were to enroll in CEC. If the current superintendent didn't understand the links between education and economic development and firmly support CEC's efforts, the partnership's activities would have been derailed, if not stopped entirely.

> "The general purpose of education is to prepare young people to be successful in their careers."
>
> Tech Prep Director, Georgia Department of Education

Further, it would have been impossible to change classroom practice if teachers hadn't been willing to broaden their views on the purpose of education and how it should be delivered. According to one teacher, "If we can employ and keep graduates on the job, they stay and move up with a company. That's good for everyone." Another remarked, "It's key to have people from business who are very visible and very involved. It helps kids build a network." It's this perspective, and a willingness on the part of educators to "step out of their comfort zones," that makes education at CEC different and effective partnership feasible.

From our earlier studies of partnership efforts between businesses and schools, we found that the best programs provide connections to post-high school education and training options. These arrangements at once greatly expand the training immediately available to high school students and offer them a ladder of opportunity toward progressively more advanced training and advantageous employment after high school. In Coweta, if the business community and school district had decided to move forward without the assistance of WCTC, they might have been able to strengthen vocational programs across the county, but they wouldn't have been able to provide students with a seamless transition from secondary to postsecondary education.

Because WCTC and CEC's secondary vocational programs are housed within the same facility, students can earn technical certificates while still in high school and have an opportunity to get a head start on the next phase of life regardless of whether that next phase involves a four-year college or university, further technical training, community college, or the workplace. Upwards of 80 percent of high school students who are also dual enrolled in WCTC through CEC pursue additional postsecondary education and training—twice the local average.[6] Administrators, faculty, and staff suspect that dual-enrolled students experience a "boost in self esteem" when they realize that they can perform at the college level and the prospect of college seems less intimidating. The partnership with the technical college makes it possible to attract students who might otherwise become disengaged from school and either drop out or squander their senior year.[7]

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[6] FSU Study. Report 1, July 2002.

[7] For more on the importance of restructuring the senior year see, Raising Our Sights: No High School Senior Left Behind. The National Commission on the High School Senior Year, October 2001.

Nobody's Feathers Have Gotten Ruffled

When asked why CEC partners had been able to build such a strong partnership, one observer noted, "The funny thing is, there were two things that didn't happen. First, there were no turf battles. Second, partners didn't mind spending the time to 'do it right.'" The CEO of CEC suggested, "We don't have all of the answers, but we have the desire to figure it out. We run into barriers, sure, but we figure out how to overcome them..."

One of the most unique aspects of the CEC partnership is the way that partners recognize the value of collaboration and work together without feeling the need to establish "territory," take credit when things go as planned, or point fingers when they don't—characteristics that are almost considered endemic to partnerships in general. As a result, everyone was eager to contribute, but no one felt the need to control partnership activities. Each partner had an area of expertise and took on corresponding roles and responsibilities. At the same time, partners felt empowered to define strategies and policies that they felt would better serve students and translate them into action. Partners were accountable to one another, and with egos in check, seemed ready, willing, and able to jump in, but also to cede control when necessary.

A second aspect of CEC that distinguishes it from other partnerships we have studied is that partners seem to understand that they are making a long-term investment and that change will take time. They made sure not to rush the development phase. In fact, the original committee spent approximately three years developing the concept, identifying and generating resources to support it, and designing the model. Because stakeholders were empowered to be active partners in supporting systemic change from the very start, rather than passive contributors, all of the partners have made considerable investments in CEC, and all are strongly committed to seeing it succeed. We were told that, "Nobody's feathers have gotten ruffled. That's because people's expectations have been met. They're being met because all of the key players are at the table. They're actively involved."

We feel that one of the partnership's most outstanding accomplishments was its ability to merge the silos that traditionally separate K-12 and postsecondary technical college systems. Across the country, separate accountability systems established at the federal and state levels have created unintentional barriers to joint efforts. It has been extremely hard for people responsible for overseeing money for education and training to merge funds into a common pot. Key players in the CEC partnership were able to stay focused on the "big picture." In order for this to be possible, partners needed to really trust one another, and a lot of energy was devoted to building the necessary trust ahead of time.

THE POWER OF WORKING TOGETHER

> *"CEC demonstrates what can happen if we all work together." Greg Wright, President, Newnan-Coweta Chamber of Commerce*

The president of the Coweta County Chamber of Commerce observed, "If we can do this as a community, there's nothing we can't do. Now that we see the success of this effort, it will lead to future collaborations." Interestingly, the success of the CEC partnership is already having carryover effects in the community. For instance, employers have started supporting the local

Boy's and Girl's Club and some have become involved in adult literacy programs. Bon-L recently gave dictionaries to all third grade students in the county in the hopes of enhancing the academic rigor of programs at the elementary school level. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, the school district and business community are jointly developing a large plot of land in the county, soon to be the home of the school district's new amphitheater and the county's new convention center.

During one conversation, the CEC model was described as "a grassroots movement," a fairly astute observation. In the beginning, everyone came to the table with a slightly different agenda. People shared their unique problems but solutions were developed in the sense of moving the group's overall agenda forward. Over time, people formed a shared vision and began working toward the big picture. Partners were not just involved in the creation, they continue to be involved in ongoing operations. Further, partnership makes sense—when communities lose businesses, they lose their economic base, then there's no money to support schools, no money for taxes, and no money for goods and services. The school district had a vested interest in finding a way to make people and businesses productive. At the same time, employers realized that not only do they depend on schools to provide them with a trained and well-prepared future workforce, good schools mean that employees aren't worried about their kids' education and can focus on doing their jobs.

> "From student to student, the specific goals of education are going to be different. The general purpose of education, however, is to produce citizens who can be engaged in society and aware of what is going on around them, so they can make informed choices."
>
> Mayor
> Newnan, Georgia

Finally, from a teacher's perspective, the partnership makes it possible to tap into other resources in the community to strengthen classroom content and delivery. One teacher observed, "As an educator, you need to work closely with business and industry. Education moves so slowly that without business input in the form of equipment, facilities, and expertise, you can't provide a good education." Another echoed this sentiment, saying, "I don't have to learn it all or to deliver it all. I can't keep up on all the technology, the subject matter, all by myself. I need to collaborate with business partners and students, and the local community, parents, all these non-traditional avenues. You can't just do that anywhere. But I can do that here."

CEC As Engine of Economic Development

> *"While CEC is bringing many desired results to the local school system—almost single-handedly lowering the county's dropout rate from 7 percent to 3 percent in its first full year of operation—CEC is having an even more dramatic effect on the interaction between the school system and the county's economic development efforts." Russ Moore, Business Owner, Consultant, Chamber of Commerce Member*

The success of our schools in graduating successful students is directly related to the success of our communities. The more economically prosperous our communities, the stronger the tax base backing our school systems, which in turn offers more resources to provide a quality education. It seems obvious. But the relationship is a dynamic one as well. Quality education produces successful graduates with talent and skills that local employers can leverage to improve productivity and support economic expansion.

Yet, for much of the last century, schools operated as independent institutions. Schools receive state funding and increasingly must administer standardized statewide tests, but for the most part control rests in the hands of local school boards. Businesses have increasingly sought to lend assistance, but that assistance, coming in the form of subsidized computer labs and in-kind contributions, tended not to affect the instructional status quo. Civic leaders, too, remained at arm's length. For example, John DeStefano, Jr., Mayor of New Haven, Connecticut confided, "I've been in politics a long time, and before I was mayor, I worked for the mayor. And in all my experience, I'd have to say that the view from city hall was that education was something that took place over there. It wasn't really our job, it was the job of educators."[8]

Reconnecting Schools to the Real World

For their part, educators have done a fairly good job of keeping "outside influences" at arm's length from the schools. Consider the language of our students when they refer to the "real world," the world that exists beyond the four walls of the school. Students clearly recognize a tangible distinction between the world of school and the world that surrounds it. The phrase itself makes clear which one they perceive as having more salience and relevance in their lives.

Our educational system, structurally and culturally, has been insulated from external forces of "the real world" that threaten to corrupt the academic integrity of the educational process. In the "ivory tower," the entire process of teaching and learning is detached and above the crude and mundane forces of the everyday world. Consider the negative connotations that have been associated with vocational education, or career education, or more recently, the school-to-work legislation. The pervasiveness of viewing K-12 education as stepping stones to higher education at a four-year college rather than as preparation for life benefits the few at the peril of the many. It is a simple fact that the vast majority of Americans do not hold a bachelor's degree. And the jobs with the highest demand at present require some postsecondary training but not a bachelor's degree.

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[8] These remarks were shared following the October 7, 2002 American Youth Policy Forum session on the role of municipal government in promoting educational improvement. Under the leadership of Mayor John DeStefano, New Haven, Connecticut has become a model city demonstrating the potential municipal leaders can play in supporting schools for the benefit of students and, in turn, local economic development.

We do not mean to imply that the resistance to social and market forces is entirely bad. We suspect that the commercialization of the classroom could lead to more negative effects than positive ones, and to maintain the mission of public education, quality must be made available to all and not sold to the highest bidder. However, protecting the sanctity of the classroom at all costs is not without its own dangers. A position that isolates schools from their surrounding communities prevents many positive changes from taking place. We don't advocate tearing down the ivory tower, simply lowering a few of the drawbridges.

Public schools are not just for the students. They belong to the community. As Joe Harless, chair of the CEC Steering Committee, might argue, it seems self-evident that everyone should benefit from them. We believe that schools have an institutional role to play in addition to their role of developing the academic growth of their individual students. That role has a strong economic component in the form of workforce development, supporting local business and industry, attracting new business, and contributing to a general improvement in the quality of life within the community.

Appreciating the Relationship Between Educational Development and Economic Development

> *"Strong local economies support better education systems; good education systems, in turn, strengthen local economies. School systems that can consistently prepare students for today's—and tomorrow's—fast-paced, fast-changing workplace help communities develop good businesses with good jobs. Those jobs lead to greater prosperity for the whole community, which, in turn, leads to better schools. But how does a community get this cycle started?" Conference Program on Education and the Economy*[9]

We believe that Coweta County has much to teach us in answer to that question.

As with all municipal leaders, Mayor DeStefano of New Haven recognized that economic development was definitely a part of his job. Somehow, he and his colleagues just never made the connection between education and economic development. Newnan Mayor Keith Brady helps make the link. "The goal of education is ultimately individualized for each student. But more generally, it boils down to producing citizens who can effectively engage themselves in our society. It offers a grounding that allows them to be productive." Mayor Brady emphasizes the importance of embedding teaching strategies that develop work ethic, pre-employment skills, and job readiness in the school curriculum. But he closes by saying, "we need strategies that produce not just job readiness, but society readiness."

In this manner, schools begin to depart from their singular focus on academic achievement and move in the direction of Joe Harless's "accomplished citizen"—graduates who are prepared for the world of work, prepared to contribute to their community, and capable of developing a healthy and safe family and making informed decisions for themselves. While focused on applied outcomes, much of this preparation requires a strong academic grounding.

To clarify the point, Dr. Harless drew a Venn diagram with two circles, one representing education, the other economic development. They overlap to a considerable degree, but not

[9] Appalachian Regional Commission Conference Program, October 29-30, 2002, Maryville, TN

completely, indicating they are not completely mutual—and that education serves many ends in addition to economic ones. He points to the significant overlap between the circles. "Here, education is key and paramount to economic development, for attracting and keeping business. This is manifested through a capable workforce that possesses relevant skills, knowledge, and information."

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

"Workforce development is education." Parent of CEC student

The most obvious and direct relationship between education and economic development is through workforce development. While workforce development is an important and explicit role of the technical college system, the relationship is less well-established and more controversial at the secondary school level.

On the one hand, educators have long recognized their role with respect to workforce development, however, this role was delimited to a narrow band of students typically categorized as part of a separate vocational education system. Responsibilities associated with workforce development goals tended to be compartmentalized and discrete from the core mission of the school (i.e., college preparation) and those students identified as non-college bound typically channeled toward a vocational track. The recent School-to-Work Opportunities Act sought to challenge this bifurcation.

> "I would hope that the general purpose of education is to prepare young people to be valuable contributors to our workforce, to support our local economy."
>
> High School Business Education Director

In contrast, a more inclusive approach toward workforce development assumes that it is the school's obligation to help empower all of its students to effectively participate in a global economy as world-class workers and citizens.[10] Workforce development at CEC falls into two broad categories. The first is generalized preparation for the world of work. All students are better served by gaining transferable employability skills. The second is specialized training for specific careers. Through specific skill development, certification, and credentializing, graduates are better positioned to launch fulfilling and lucrative careers.

By extending the goals of workforce development down into the secondary grades, especially in collaboration with community and technical colleges, some significant benefits to both students and community stakeholders are gained. Through career guidance, career preparation, college guidance, and more efficient alignment of personal skills and organizational needs, students gain a better appreciation for the relationship between education, training, and employment. In short, it helps to tighten the linkages between school, college, and the workplace.

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[10] One state that has made considerable strides in this direction is North Carolina. "Workforce Development Education," begins with exploratory courses in grade 6 and leads to specialized classroom instruction in grades 11 and 12. Programs in Workforce Development are not compartmentalized but rather integrated into the broader curriculum. Recent statistics indicate that nearly 70 percent of all students enrolled in grades 9-12 took at least one workforce development education course. These courses are designed to contribute to the broad educational achievement of students, including basic skills such as reading, writing, and mathematics as well as enhance their ability to work independently and as part of a team, think creatively, solve problems, and utilize technology.

A review of the many statements expressed during our interviews in Newnan reflects a similar orientation. It is noteworthy that this orientation is shared by both those within and outside the school system. A curriculum developer told us that "CEC is a dynamic place that is responsive to its customers. This includes the students but extends to the private sector as well. CEC can be envisioned as a mechanism for workforce development, anticipating and addressing the workforce needs of local business and industry."

A technical college instructor put it this way, "Education at CEC prepares students with the skills to go right into work. Businesses have a larger pool of potential employees to draw from. Kids who aren't ready to go to college can test a career path out."

Effective workforce development requires education to be responsive to local labor market conditions. Community and technical colleges have more experience in this regard than do high schools. The partnership with postsecondary education and local business, therefore, is critical. A high school instructor stated that "CEC programs quickly match up employer needs with the education and training of the labor supply. As a result, it reduces the training time employers need to provide, thereby increasing efficiency."

Perhaps the Commissioner of Adult and Technical Education summed it up best. "Our state is interested in competing for high-skill/high-wage jobs. In that competition, education is everything."

Supporting Local Industry

> *"If we can employ and keep graduates on the job, they stay with company, they move up within the company. That's good for everyone." CEC High School Director*

Developing the basic and applied skills of young people equips them for productive careers and self-sufficiency. However, the advantages of workforce development at the high school- and technical college-level translates into some very powerful benefits for local industry as well. It is worth noting that today's business leaders have a deeper appreciation for the value of an educated and well-prepared workforce. The early experience of CEC helps bear this out. Russ Moore, a local businessman and Chamber member, explains this story best.

> "The traditional approach for cities and counties to recruit and retain large manufacturers is for them to cooperate with states and offer significant incentive packages, often including breaks on taxes and free land. Recently, Coweta County was faced with the reality that its largest manufacturer was considering relocating and was actively being courted by other Georgia counties and several states. The situation was not helped by a formal policy against offering incentive packages to industries.
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> "The public-private entity [21st Century Coweta County] that was working most closely with the manufacturer [Yamaha] to keep it in Coweta had its hands tied until CEC stepped up to the plate with an offer to establish a lab that would train students using the manufacturer's actual equipment and products. This lab would guarantee the company an affordable way to recruit and train its own workforce locally.

"CEC's offer was enough to keep the manufacturer in Coweta. In fact, the company decided to build a $40 million expansion and create an additional 300 jobs. The fact that the economic impact of Yamaha's decision to stay and expand is many times greater than Coweta's investment in CEC makes the educational center something of a catalyst."

"The purpose of education is to prepare folks for the 21st century global workforce. It's a lifelong endeavor."

Executive Vice President, WCTC

CEC was the deciding factor to keep Yamaha and encourage them to grow. Education and training in the service of workforce development was seen as more valuable than other incentives like deferred taxes, lower property taxes, even free land. Strong educational systems can be a tremendous asset, since today's workers have to be skilled to a greater and greater degree. And if training is done prior to employment, the employer can experience a tremendous savings in time and money.

Other communities have discovered the power of thoughtful school-business partnerships in retaining major employers. Louisville, Kentucky almost lost UPS before developing Metro College, an outgrowth of their school-to-work initiative. Understanding that employee recruitment and retention had been an obstacle for UPS, city and state officials along with local education administrators pooled their resources to begin an education program that would produce the workforce needed to operate its new mega-hub and keep UPS in Louisville.

"Through CEC, we have a real articulation between private sector needs and educational delivery," stated an educator. "There's a real connection between the two." A business manager offers the following perspective. "From an economic development point of view, CEC moves us to the next level of flexibility. We can customize and create curriculum on an as-needed basis. We can be targeted. You can't turn the whole school system around overnight; it's like a big ship. CEC affords a measure of maneuverability."

Attracting New Industry

Coweta County possesses a number of cultural and geographic advantages that help attract business. It is easily accessible via the interstate highway system, it is within an hour's drive to a major airport, and it boasts a population of hard-working, conscientious people that are incredibly invested in giving back to the community. Yet a lot of communities within a fifty-mile radius of Atlanta tend to promote the same things. One of the more exciting dimensions of a reconceptualized educational system is the role it can play in helping to attract new industry. Initiatives like CEC make Coweta County unique.

It is now common for communities to tout their educational resources when attracting new residents and businesses. The following example from Virginia is a case in point: "The Hampton Roads region contains a greater concentration of learning institutions than any other area of Virginia. Whether you're looking for a prestigious graduate program, training for employees, or a good school for your third-grader, Hampton Roads provides a long list of options."

What is less common, but becoming recognized as a viable economic development tool, is the active partnership between educators, the private sector, and regional economic development

entities to strategically position and reconfigure education. Much in the same way communities develop their physical and technological infrastructure, Coweta has decided to develop its educational infrastructure to offer potential new businesses and industries a more attractive environment—in this case, an environment characterized by a reconceptualized approach to education, training, and workforce development.

Smart Growth

Coweta County has given more thought to what type of industry it wants to attract and in turn seeks to create the characteristics those industries are going to look for. As a small business owner stated, "People are trying to bring a higher tech focus and clean industries into the community. Education can supply employees to work in these jobs." Proactive approaches to economic growth such as this stand in contrast to traditional ones of identifying what features a community has, advertising those, and accepting whatever businesses that attracts.

Local leaders recognized that the existing labor market in the county would not support high-wage, high-tech employers. This placed Coweta at a disadvantage with respect to its economic development goals. By providing a platform of operations for West Central Technical College and linking its certificate programs to high school education, Newnan, and Coweta County more generally, address this concern. As a manager remarked, "CEC makes us appear more sophisticated. More importantly, CEC is a practical solution to this problem."

DIRECT AND INDIRECT BENEFITS

In order to fully appreciate the impact education can have as an engine of economic development, it is important to recognize that the community gains through both direct and indirect benefits. The most obvious benefits are the direct ones—especially the ones that accrue to the students and the graduates. As we saw above, CEC students value the innovative educational experience, the demonstrable gains in skill, and the employer-recognized credentials they earn. Indeed, the student effects of educational reforms that embrace the principles of school-to-career are becoming increasingly well documented.[11]

In our own work that tracks the educational and career trajectories of high school students, we have found that participants in career development programs, in contrast to their non-participating peers, tend to pursue postsecondary education at higher rates; maintain good grades; report having been better prepared for the transition from high school to college and employment; take more tangible steps toward achieving their career goals; and report earning higher wages.[12]

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[11] See, for example, K.L. Hughes, et al. (2001) *School-to-Work: Making a Difference in Education*. New York, NY: Institute on Education and the Economy, Teachers College, Columbia University.

[12] See MacAllum, K., et al. (2002) *Moving Forward: College and Career Transitions of LAMP Graduates*. Washington, DC: Academy for Educational Development, and Bozick, R. and MacAllum, K. (2002) *Does Participation in School-to-Career Limit Students' Educational and Career Options?* Journal of Career and Technical Education. Vol. 18, No. 2.

Of course, companies that hire the graduates of these programs experience direct benefits as well in the form of improved productivity, reduced turnover, and savings with respect to training costs. Our work has uncovered additional benefits for firms that actively partner with schools and colleges. For example, partnering firms reported higher levels of morale among employees, increased levels of communication between management and labor, reduced recruitment costs, and improved corporate image within the community.[13]

However, our visit to CEC and Coweta County drew our attention to an entirely new range of benefits that often go undocumented in typical studies. Individuals we spoke with, from education, business, municipal government, and economic development alike, referenced what can only be termed indirect benefits. These include the production of capable and involved citizens, the secondary effects of industry staying and new businesses arriving, increased property values, reduced brain drain, enhanced quality of life, and a genuine sense of civic pride.

The importance of these indirect benefits came through clearly during a conversation with the managers at Newnan Utilities, a strong supporter of CEC, when they stated that "we've hired only one or two CEC graduates. But CEC is nevertheless critical to us, because we need companies like Bon-L to be happy, and to stay, since they're big customers of ours. For our organization to thrive, we need a vital economic environment."

> "The purpose of education is to provide citizens with the skills they need to be successful in life, which in turn will be used to create a more vibrant community."
>
> President, Chamber of Commerce

In conversation with a hospital administrator, we learned that the major workforce development issue facing the healthcare industry is a severe nursing shortage. While CEC offers a Patient Care Assisting certificate program, the school is not producing registered nurses which would directly address this crisis. "Some of those graduates might decide to continue on for their RN and that would be great," said Steve Anderson of Emory Peachtree Hospital. But the real benefits that Mr. Anderson focused on were more indirect in nature.

"As a hospital, we're a catalyst for economic development and a recipient of it," he explained. "As people move in and new company's open up, those people will need healthcare, and we will have more folks to serve. Economic development is necessary for a robust healthcare system, otherwise we can't afford to serve our population. And as we grow, we create more jobs, including those considered high tech and high skill."

The Newnan-Coweta Chamber of Commerce, instrumental in gaining the political and financial support at the state level for CEC, clearly recognizes the connection between education and economic development. The president of the Chamber, Greg Wright noted that initiatives like CEC "make a contribution to the entire community, a contribution to the economic health of the entire area."

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[13] See MacAllum, K., and Charner, I. (2000) *Beyond the Success of Students*. Washington, DC: Academy for Educational Development.

An Education Hub To Better the Economy

It is important to recognize how educational institutions like CEC fit in to what has been termed the knowledge supply chain. By producing graduates with marketable skills, schools add value to their communities that go far beyond the obvious. A focus on direct and immediate results often obscures the value of indirect benefits.[14] Worse, an emphasis on immediate results can lead to a reduction in commitment and support since we rarely do an adequate job of documenting outcomes that are a step or two removed from high school graduation, college enrollment, or that first job placement. CEC staff and partners embrace a philosophy that encompasses the bigger picture—one that is notable for its forward vision.

Coming to consensus on this philosophy took lots of intentional work and communication. A school administrator stated that "we have educated our business community on what it takes to support lasting change." As if to prove her point, a plant manager put it this way: "We have to take the perspective that with CEC, we are seeding the field. We're not looking for major outcomes just yet. Overtime, as fewer kids drop out of our schools, more kids will graduate and hopefully stay in Newnan. It takes time to seed change."

> "The purpose of education is so we can call enjoy a better quality of life. I used to think it was only about the children, but I've come to discover that it is also about getting a workforce prepared so they can contribute to the community. And it's continuous, it must always be going on."
>
> Assistant General Manager

The instructional staff at CEC are not only comfortable with their reconceptualized mission, they embrace it. The following quote is fairly typical of responses we received. "Our number one goal is to provide a supply of workers for the economy—people who can be productive at their jobs. We aim to employ and keep these graduates on the job, staying with the company and moving up within the company."

One of the most intriguing findings from our interviews in Coweta and elsewhere is how positively students react to a reconceptualized educational process that intentionally places education in the center of an economic development strategy. When asked how CEC differs from her base school, one student's reply reflects the value from her perspective for tightening the linkage between school and work. "Teachers and staff don't let you slack off. They push you. They show you all of your options, you know, in school and in the work world. It's an education hub to better the economy. The kids are graduating with technical credentials and are getting jobs. It creates so many opportunities."

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[14] Several other indirect benefits were referenced during our interviews. These include: **Duplication reduction**: Because students can earn both secondary and postsecondary credits at the same time, tax payers win since the schools are not duplicating services. **Strengthened linkages**: The new superintendent cited as one of the benefits of the partnership the fact that she immediately had a network with postsecondary institutions, and links to financial resources, human resources, and the business community. **Enhanced quality of life**: Employers noted that as employees skills go up, they can pay them more. As wages go up and those dollars circulate throughout the community, given the multiplier effect, the general quality of life goes up. **Carry over to other grade levels**: For example, an outgrowth of the deliberations surrounding CEC led to smaller classes at the elementary level and lower teacher/student ratios.

WIN, WIN, WIN

The advantages gained by graduates of reconceptualized educational initiatives that offer career building skill development and seamless transitions to higher education and employment are significant. Indeed, the life-long effects on graduates and their families can be profound. However, it is important to recognize that initiatives like CEC benefit more than the individual students who attend them.

Such approaches offer employers a means for recruitment and training of new employees, a stronger pool of job candidates, upgraded skills for existing employees, and improved retention. Economic development agencies and government officials gain as well since the model helps ensure the vitality and growth of the local and regional economy by helping employers and supporting key economic sectors. The general quality of life within the community is enhanced as employment and individual wages go up, smart growth takes place, the tax base increases, and economic vitality is robust. To put it simply, "It's a win-win-win."

LESSONS LEARNED FOR PROMOTING EDUCATIONAL IMPROVEMENT AND REPLICATION OF THE CEC MODEL

1. Partnership

Each of the major stakeholder groups was equally important in the development of CEC, and their continued involvement will be absolutely essential for future success.

A facilitated process of communication, deliberation, and planning ensured that partners moved from idiosyncratic problems and issues toward consensus on mutually beneficial solutions and approaches.

Through this process, partners came to trust one another. As a result, all are committed to seeing CEC succeed.

By staying focused on achieving their common vision and moving the group's overall agenda forward, each partner gains community-wide support in accomplishing their discrete goals.

Everyone was eager to contribute, but no one felt the need to control partnership activities.

Partners recognize the value of collaboration. They work together without feeling the need to establish "territory," take credit when things go well, and point fingers when they don't.

CEC leadership recognizes the need to nurture the partnership as well as the educational model. The latter can not be accomplished without the former.

2. Leadership

CEC is the result of committed leadership from the highest levels on all sides.

Leadership for both high school and technical college are housed on-site at CEC which enhances coordination, collaboration, and communication.

The CEO acts as a facilitator, building and strengthening connections between business partners, the school district, West Central Technical College, parents, state and local political officials, and the community at-large.

The CEO has strong communications skills, a clear commitment to quality education, the ability to convey this vision while delegating and empowering staff, sincerity and integrity, and the ability to manage multifaceted projects.

Leadership makes a conscious commitment to extend a high level of autonomy and respect to staff with an emphasis on professionalism.

The CEO's business pedigree helps bridge the chasm between education and the private sector. He's fluent in both education and business parlance and has the trust and respect of all partners.

3. Flexibility

As a charter school, CEC is not limited by the rules and regulations that have become ingrained in the more traditional education system.

CEC is responsive to local needs. Curriculum and program decisions are industry-driven.

Education is not confined to the four walls of the school. Through work-based learning and internships, the community becomes the classroom.

CEC creates and reinforces a culture that blurs the lines between the worlds of education and business. Students gain hands-on experience through work-based learning.

Charter school status distances CEC from the conventional rules and regulations emanating from the State and from the Superintendent's office. This allows the superintendent to cede increased power to the school's CEO. In turn, the CEO cedes power to the instructional staff thereby institutionalizing flexibility.

4. Commitment

In order to effect change, schools need support and must rely on resources—human, financial, and material—from outside the school system. All partners have made considerable investments in CEC and all are strongly committed to seeing it succeed.

All partners are driven by enlightened self-interest rather than corporate citizenship or altruism.

Outcomes of the CEC initiative are framed in tangible, economic implications for the broader community. Because partners perceive there will be a return on their investment, they are willing to make significant investments in anticipation of significant returns.

Clear and consistent communication of vision, goals, and anticipated outcomes help decision-makers to justify and strengthen their respective levels of commitment.

Visibility, good public relations, and high profile champions in business, education, and political office help secure and maintain organizational commitments.

It is important to obtain commitments for the long haul. Partners need to understand that they are making a long-term investment and that change will take time.

Ongoing responsiveness of CEC leadership and instructional practice to local needs and interests ensure commitment over the long-term.

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